

Well, This is Expected

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Summary: For every quarter of the year, the dragons always raid my village. I have always wondered why. Now, I wish my question wasn't answered. AU

## 1. Morning Raid

\*\*Author's Notes: \*\*This was just some random idea that popped in my head. ^-^' I'm still working on my other fic. Who would have thought that research and editing could be so time consuming?

\*sarcasm\*

\*\*Warning:\*\* This is an AU story. It follows the canon story quite a bit but only just a bit as the story will later progress.

\*\*Disclaimer: \*\*I don't own How to Train Your Dragon or any of its character. They belong to Cressida Cowell (novel wise) and DreamWorks (movie wise).

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><p><strong>Well, This is Expected<strong>

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><p><em><strong>Chapter 1: Morning Raid<strong>\_

The people are hustling and bustling. Men are running here and there with sacks of wheat and grain in their shoulders. Carts full of food items are being wheeled into the nearest storage house while the animals are herd into the barn. Women can be seen pulling their children into the meeting hall in haste. The whole village is already alive this early in the morning. In fact, it was so early that stars could still be seen in the dark sky. Only the burning houses and hot orange flames coming from the quarterly pests illuminate the entire

village.

People scream as the pests roar and flap their mighty wings. They shoot torrents of fire on our establishments and farm fields. They sweep away the unguarded sheeps, buffaloes, and pigs. If those animals happen to be guarded, they tear apart those brave protective men with their massive jaws and claws.

I'm running a midst this chaos, quickly navigating my way to the blacksmith shop. Villagers threw me dirty and wary looks as I pass them by.

"Go to the meeting hall, lad!" one of them yells at me.

"Get out of here." another one warns me.

"Hiccup!"

By the way, my name is Hiccup. Great name, I know, but it's the norm in this quaint village of Berk. Oh and those pests I'm talking about? They're dragons. That's right, dragons. Those creatures do not exist only in myths and legends. They're real. They're vicious. They're dangerous and they never ever fail to disrupt and destroy the lives of everyone in here.

Berk is one of the seven large villages in the entire country of Misery. Again, great name but like I said it's the norm in here. My community resides near the Hopeless Mountain of the north. We're blessed to be beside the great river of Freezing to Death. All in all, it's a resourceful and perfect place to live in. A paradise. But of course, that is too good to be true because for all the perfection of this place has there is a catch. A very very dangerous catch.

I'm about turn in the left corner of the street when fire blazed on my path. Luckily, someone managed to pull me back at the last moment. I'm about to thank the person when I realize-

"Hiccup, what are you doing in here?!" my father demands with great fury.

I stammer in my answer. "I- I was about to go to Gobber's. I figure that I could help and-"

One of the watch towers of the village explodes and collapses. People scream as they run away from the crumbling structure.

"Never mind. Just go!" he hastily dismisses me. Then he calls my uncle and orders him to gather the Vikings into the defences.

I run away and finally reached the smith shop where Gobber, my mentor is working already.

"Morning, lad! Come to join the party?" he greets me.

I take off my vest and wear my working apron.

"Me? No. I'm way too muscular to miss out this fight." I answer sarcastically as I lift a rather heavy iron hammer back into the weapons holder.

"Well, those blasted creatures needed a toothpick anyway!" he jests as he hammers on the broken sword he's fixing.

Some of the Vikings turn their dull bloody weapons in. I take a sword from them and begin to sharpen it.

No one knows why but for every quarter of the year, the dragons raid our village. They take our food and animals. They burn the fields and houses. It is an occurrence that no one could explain. Dragons are very large and powerful creatures. They could hunt their own food without much difficulty. So why do they take from us? Why do they burn our fields and houses? They won't get any food by destroying them. So why?

Those questions are left to unanswered perhaps forever. The people do not care about the dragons' motives in the attack. What is important is what we will need to do about it. Moving out of Berk is not an option. Relocating and resettling a community, which compose of hundreds of people, to another place is a difficult process. Berk is also a place that's perfect to live in. There's an abundant resource of water and trees. It's a paradise. We cannot leave a place like this. We cannot find another place like this in the whole country of Misery. So my village took a more dangerous but still slightly better solution: fight back.

For seven generations, Berk has trained warriors dedicated to fight dragons and protect the village from dragons. These warriors are called Vikings. They are the most celebrated and respected individuals in the village. Well our lives do greatly depend on them so the people's idolization and worship of them are quite understandable. Vikings is always given the best quality of food, drinks, clothes, houses, and even spouses. Yes, if you're a Viking in this place, you're an automatic sought after bachelor or bachelorette. Bachelor? Why yes, Berkian women could also become Vikings. As long as you can lift a shield and swing a hammer or an axe, you are a Viking potential, regardless of your gender.

My father, Stoick the Vast, is also a Viking. How could he not when people say that when he was a baby he popped a dragon's head clean off its shoulder? It's a story I absolutely believe to be true. He's the strongest and the most respected Viking. That's why he was elected Chief of the village.

I tried following his footsteps as a Viking. Tried is the keyword. I can't lift a shield and a sword without stumbling. Hammers? Out of the question. Bolas? I can't throw those wretched things without having myself caught in it. Why do I fail? Well, I won't be lying about myself. I'm a talking fishbone. That's right. Fish. Bone. Everyone, myself included, always wonder how someone like my father, who is extra-large and with big beefy arms, had a son that was like err... me: thin, weak, and even smaller than the girls of my age. People can't pin the blame on my mother with my abnormal physique. Odin knows I miss her. She was a Viking too, one of the most celebrated Shield Maidens to be exact. And she's faithful. Imply otherwise and my father will kill you. So in the end, the people thought the problem is just me. I'm an odd one so I'm at fault with my shortcomings. It's unfair, I know, I couldn't help it if the gods thought it will be good to make me into something like... this. But there's nothing else to be done. I'm a fishbone and that's it.

I tried getting better. Again keyword: \_tried.\_ I run laps. I exercise. I eat well. I really really tried. But for all my will and enthusiasm, my body just can't achieve the Viking standards. My father is disappointed. He may not show it because he loves and cherishes me for what I just am but he's still disappointed. I still tried though. For the last couple of raids, I tried to help by setting up traps and throwing bolas. All of which failed. Grandly. My inadvertent victims still glare at me with a passion of a thousand suns whenever I walk within three feet radius near them.

I still want to become a Viking though despite those mishaps and trained to become better. But my father already considered me as a hopeless case. So he signed me instead to an apprenticeship with his best friend, Gobber. Gobber was the village's trusted blacksmith. He is the best smith person- the best in the whole country of Misery. His works are highly demanded: Bog Burglar village, Meat Head tribe, the list is quite long. My father thought that if I can't fight then at least I could help people to fight. Gobber did tell him that I have a potential as a blacksmith. A little scrawny but with potential. And so, my dream of becoming a Viking was pretty much ended and I was trained to become a smith person.

To the entire village, it was for the best. I won't wreak havoc anymore during the raids. To my father, it was for the best. I will be safe from myself, the dragons, and an angry mob. To Gobber, it was for the best. He finally had an apprentice who meets his expectations. But for me, it wasn't the best. I feel miserable. I'm satisfied that I'm not that useless but still miserable. I failed my father. I failed myself. I know I'm better than this. I know I'm supposed to do something more. To be something more. This can't be just it.

Suddenly, a whistling, screeching sound grow louder and louder outside.

"Night Fury!" a Viking yells. Then resounding boom shakes the entire village.

I instinctively duck. I can't help it. It's a reaction ingrained in my whole being ever since I was little. Well, littler.

People generally don't really care about the differences of dragons. Dragons are dragons however they look and act. But warriors still noted it for safety measures. Gronckles are to avoid because of their powerful shots. Nadders are difficult to deal with because of their spiked tails and agility. Zippelbacks are tricky and dangerous. It is a two headed creature; one breathes out a poisonous flammable gas while the other releases fire. It is one of the major destroyers of our fields. Nightmares, they have a nasty habit of setting themselves on fire when attacking. But the most dangerous are the Night Furies. Those dragons never show themselves and their strong powerful shots never ever miss. No one has ever seen those dragons or if they did, then they're no longer alive to tell the tale.

As swift as they came, the raid is finally over. The Night Fury's shot must have been the signal for the other dragons to end the raid. I look out of the shop's windows. The fire breathing pests are flying away, some with animals and sacks of food in their claws.

The sun was slowly rising. It casts an orange glow on burned houses,

ashes, and scattered animal and human remains. Human remains. Mauled. Burned. Dead people. I hurl myself out of the window and into a nearby pail. No matter how many times I see death, I still feel the need to throw up.

"Hiccup, will you be okay? I need to help your father assess the damages." Gobber asks as I busily retch in the corner.

I feel disoriented and sick but my mentor had more important things to do other than looking after me. I cough and spit in the pail.

"I-I'll be fine, Gobber. Just go." I face him which is a bad idea as a bit of drool and vomit trickles from my mouth.

The man gives me a flat look.

I immediately wipe my lips. "Don't worry." My voice sounds a bit raspy. "This is the forge. It's the last possible place for me to endanger myself."

Gobber snorts at that. "The last time I left you alone here, I ended up facing an angry mob with pitchforks and axes on your behalf." He says jokingly. Gobber's the only person in the village who is used and amused by my antics. It is something I highly appreciate.

"Don't worry, I'll make sure that they include spears and swords in their threat this time. I know you love to have a good fight with them."

The two of us laugh at that. My mentor was an ex-Viking. He was removed from the ranks because of his amputated hand and leg courtesy of the dragons. The people deemed him incapable of fighting. He was enraged by that. He told me how he tore off half of the warrior council's ears as he screamed in protest about the decision. But father convinced him to just concede to it. He couldn't fight properly with a wooden peg leg and an axe hand, no matter how good they were made. Gobber grudgingly accepted the termination of his Viking status and poured all his efforts in the forge instead. Through the years, he found himself to be enjoying his new place in the society although he still misses the excitement of the battlefield.

"Just go, I'll be fine." I tell him when the mirth of my joke subsided.

Gobber hobbled to the shop's door. "Fine then. Man the forge, Hiccup." He says in an authoritative tone.

I give him a mock salute as a response and with that he left.

I sigh as the door closes shut. I bravely look out of the window again. The sun is now shining brightly in the sky. Cries and sobs of rage and mourning fill the village while the smell of smoke and death lingers in the air. The morning breeze picks up the ashes of wood, trees, animals, and humans and carries them to perhaps a better place we would never know.

I walk away from the window and go to work. I add wood on the burning furnace and prepare the metals and tools for repair. People will come

later with broken pots, fences, shields, and weapons. It's going to be busy but I hope I will have enough spare time to work on my secret invention later.

Let's see: dragon raid, burned houses, destroyed livestock, people dead. Today is just another day in the paradise we call Berk.

## 2. Left Behind

**\*\*Author's Notes:** \*\*Thanks for those that reviewed and put this story in their faves and alerts. Thank you! Here's the new chapter.

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><p><strong><em>Chapter 2: Left Behind<em>\*\*

I wipe my brow and decide to take a bit of a break as I dip the woman's now fixed pot into a bucket of water. It is the poor lady's last cooking utensil. Luckily, it only had a slight crack at the bottom. It is something I could still fix without Gobber's supervision. I'm still an apprentice not a miracle worker. I would still need weeks of practice before I could fix any seriously damaged things decently. Guessing that the pot was cool enough, I take it out of the water and wipe it with some clean cloth. I then give it to the woman waiting patiently outside the shop. She insisted on waiting for it since she can't cook anything without it.

"Here it is, Ma'm." I give her the fixed utensil.

She takes it gingerly and looks at it. I feel a little nervous at her inspection. This was just my third time fixing things on my own. All of my apprenticeship so far only involves observing, understanding, listening, and theorizing. I also have the eternal duty of keeping the shop clean and the furnace burning brightly during working days. I don't have much experience yet. But then the woman smiles warmly and gives me two pieces of coins.

"Thank you." She says and walks off.

Well, at least I have one happy customer to brag. The last two people I helped were so dissatisfied with my work that Gobber amended it. My mentor wasn't mad about it though. He said that proper smithing requires lots of experience and practice not to mention that I'm still scrawny. I didn't have the proper upper body strength for the job yet. So ever since then, I was also assigned to wood chopping duty to my horror. It was a job that was really really awful. I lost

count on how many times I nearly chopped my hand and feet. I complained about it to Gobber one time. I said that one of the reasons I couldn't be a warrior was because I can't carry an axe and an axe is what I'm precisely using when chopping wood! He just laughed it off and told me not to worry and that the two axes were different. A battle axe was a bit lighter than the one I'm using. It also has a sharper blade. He was just making me use the chopping axe to develop my arm muscles and strength. His explanation didn't assure me one bit and the next day, I almost succeeded in chopping my own head. Gobber immediately pulled me out of wood chopping duty and gave me an everyday task of hammering random metals for a full hour instead. I was also strictly forbidden from going near any kind of axe until Gobber proclaimed me as a full-fledged blacksmith himself. I guess I gave him quite a scare with that accident.

I go back inside the shop. I sigh as my eyes land on the rest of the things that still needed smithing. It's a pity I can't do those yet. They are all severely damaged and Gobber is the only one that could fix them. I wearily take off my apron and stretch. My arms are sore and my back is stiff after this busy morning. I should take a nap.

Someone taps on the shop's window counter and I almost jump in surprise. It's more likely customer. This annoys me a bit. Just when I thought I could rest, gods dropped me a new task instead. Sighing, I take my apron again.

"Good morning, dear Sir or Ma'm, how may I help you on this fine mor-"

Words die in my mouth as my eyes lock with the most beautiful sight in the whole wide world. Sweet Odin, Freya, Thor, gods!

"Hi, Astrid! Hi, Astrid! Umm, hi Astrid!"

Oh it's Astrid. Astrid! Astrid Hofferson with the elegant mane of golden sunshine and sparkly blue eyes as clear as the summer sky. It's her with those perfectly white skin and pretty mouth and sexy figure and-

"I need whetstone for sharpening." Her cool voice cuts my thoughts off.

"Huh a what?" I ask and hurriedly go to the counter. It's a bad idea as I trip on my own feet and I sprawl over the dirty floor in seconds. Great job, Hiccup. Embarrass yourself in front of the girl of your dreams, would you?

I stand up immediately. I think Astrid raises her magnificent golden eyebrow at my sudden disappearance and re-appearance trick. "A- a whetsone? For what?" I ask again as I smoothly rest my arm in the counter top and attempt to lean on her face in a desperate effort to come off as charming. Again, bad idea. My arm slips and I fall on the floor again, this time though I brought down a little hammer and scraps of metals with me. Smooth, Hiccup Horrendous Haddock III. Real smooth.

I faintly hear Astrid sigh in frustration. "Just give me a whetstone, Hiccup." She drawls.

That's one of the things that I really love about Astrid. Many people always calls me by my name but they always say it with various intonations ranging from mocking to downright angry. Honorifics never fail to be included too: Useless, Wimp, Hopeless, Loser, the list goes on although I prefer Fishbone. But with Astrid, it's nothing like that. She says my name as it is. No nicknames. No tones. Whenever she says my name, it's just "Hiccup" Hiccup. It makes me feel that I'm my own real person whenever I'm around her.

"Ok, whetstone. Got it." I say as I scramble up and search the shop.

Stone. Stone. Whetstone. Stone. I rummage through the drawers and tables. Stone. Stone. Where the Hel are the stupid whetstones!  
!

From the corner of my eye, I see Astrid shift, oh gods does she have lovely hips, and cross her arms in her chest. "If you don't have any then I could just-"

"No!" I yell. She blinks at my sudden outburst. "No, no, no, Astrid. I meanâ€œ!" I look around the shop. That stupid stone has to be in here somewhere! I never had had a chance to do Astrid a favour. I don't want to mess this up! In my frantic, my eyes fall on the sharpening wheel. I always use that to sharpen swords. Maybe I could use that.

"I could just sharpen your axe here." I tell her with a smile.

She eyes me warily. She has lovely eyes. I hope she trims her bangs a little bit since it hides her left eye but still, she has really really lovely blue eyes.

"Maybe, I'll just go back some other time." There's a tinge of distrust in her voice and it hurts to know that it's justly directed at me. "Maybe I could just borrow from Ruffnut." She says and turns around to walk away.

In a desperate effort to make her stay, I fling half of myself out of the window and grab the handle of her axe.

She whirls around. "What are you doing?" she demands and tries to pull the axe from me.

"Trying to catch some fish." I deadpan.

Astrid gives me a flat look. She's unimpressed by my sarcasm.

"Look, just let me sharpen it. Don't worry. I won't do anything bad to it." I plead.

"Hiccup, just forget about it. I'll just borrow Ruff's whetstone. I can take care of this." She tugs her axe away from me again. Refusing to let go, I hold the axe even tighter and let myself be dragged even further out of the window.

"No. Just let me help. Please, Astrid." I look into her eyes imploringly.

We stare at each other for perhaps a few seconds, though if you ask

me it felt like a wonderful eternity, and she sighs in defeat.

"Fine. But sharpen it while Gobber is with you. I'll take back my axe later and if you damage it even just a little bit, I'll snap you in half like a twig." She warns me.

It's nice that she gave me a chance, even if it came with a serious bodily threat. "Don't worry, Astrid. I won't Astrid. Thanks Ast-Oof!" I ungracefully drop on the ground with my left foot caught in the shop's window. She had let go of the axe and walked away, hence my only balance support disappeared. Love hurts.

"Owâ€|"

"What are you doing, Hiccup?"

I look up and see Gobber staring at me funnily.

"Trying to catch some fish." I reply. I try to pull myself upright but my foot was still in the window and I fall face first on the ground again.

Gobber laughs since he's used to my unique brand of humor. He seems oblivious to my predicament though. "Fish huh? Is it a fish with a mane of golden sunshine and sparkly blue eyes as clear as the sky?" he asks.

I glare at him.

He shrugs. "What? You always describe the Hofferson lass like that whenever you daydream and cause havoc in the shop with your inattentiveness. Hah! Just you getting a glimpse of her from the windows always end up with me having to save your doomed limbs!" he laughs again.

"Thank you for summing that up." I grumble as I attempt to stand up again.

Gobber finally helps me. He hooks the collar of my shirt and brings me inside the shop while dangling me like a freshly caught fish.

He clicks his tongue in disappointment with the sight that welcomed him.

"Sorry," I say. "I'll clean it up later."

The shop is in an entire mess from my search earlier. Tools littering the floor, papers here and there, drawers open and half open.

"Why later when you can do it now, lad?" he asks warily.

I hold up Astrid's axe in defense. "I need to sharpen this first."

Gobber's eyes narrows at the weapon I'm holding. "Hiccup, what did I say about axes?"

"Never hold or go near them." I answer dutifully.

"Then why are holding one right now, Hiccup?"

He drops me and makes a grab for the axe and I immediately hide it behind my back with great effort.

"Gobber please, I want to fix this myself."

"No, give it here. You clean the shop while I take care of it." His arm went over my shoulder and he grabs the axe handle.

"No, please! It's Astrid's!"

That stops him. He eyes me and I stare back with determination.

"I want to fix it myself because it's Astrid's."

He finally lets go of the axe and then shakes his head. "Well, that explains everything. You should have said so in the first place, lad."

I raise my eyebrow at the accusation. "Sorry, you kind of suddenly tried taking it away from me."

"You can't blame me. It's my immediate reaction ever since the Chopping incident." He grins.

"Could we please forget about that?"

As if he didn't hear me, Gobber continues to talk. "Up until now, I'm still wondering how did that blade came off from the handle and-"

"Gobber!"

He laughs heartily. "Fine. Fine. Now, come on. Let's get to it." He gestures on the sharpening wheel. "I'll let you fix that but because it's a special case. If I caught you attempting to fix another axe again I'll triple your hammering exercise."

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><p>One shop clean, one axe sharpened, and a dozen of accidents later, the sun had already set and I am finally walking back home. Gobber told me that I already need to rest since I've been in the forge since early dawn. I wanted to stay a little bit more since Astrid told me that she'll pick up her axe tonight but Gobber insisted my leave. He promised me that if Astrid comes, he'll tell her that the axe isn't ready yet and to just pick it up tomorrow morning. He will let me return the axe to her personally.</p>

My whole body is aching from all the lifting and hammering. Stinging pain constantly throb from my bandaged hands. I got a little careless while sharpening Astrid's axe. I look around. Most of the houses are rebuilt already. The people of Berk have become so used to the damages caused by the raids that constructing and repairing houses have become second nature to them. You have to admire our resiliency, read that as stubbornness, to these dragon encounters. I then observe the dark sky. Stars twinkle and the moon shines brightly. It's beautiful and serene. One will never think that a village under this sky would suffer.

I'm near my home and I notice that there's already light inside. Oh joy, my father got back early. Now, nothing is really bad about that. You see, ever since my mother died, may her soul rest in peace in Valhalla, Dad and I divided the work between us. Sure we could ask other people to do it for us but we're Haddocks. We never let others do our own work. So, farm managing fell into my father's hands while housekeeping and cooking became my responsibility. The two of us were happy with the arrangement. I don't mind doing women's work. There's nothing wrong with it and I can't picture my Dad sewing and cleaning the house. It's something that's downright weird. Cooking is something that I really enjoy too. I always prepare breakfast and dinner. Lunch, not so much since we tend to eat at the mead hall during that time of the day. But whenever Dad is home earlier than me, he tries to cook dinner. Tries. Now, believe me when I say that my father is as good at cooking as I am with fighting. Yes. Dad and the kitchen are a nasty combination. I could still remember the black-lump-piece-of-whatever-poor-animal meat I was forced to eat one time. It resulted to a late night visit with the village healer. I made it a point to arrive home earlier than him since then. I do not want to die from food poisoning.

Nervously, I speed up my walk and smell smoke. Alarm bells start ringing in my head. Beard of Thor! Something's burning! Food is burning! The house is burning!

"Dad!" I yank our door open and discover something weird.

My dad looks at me with surprise. He's holding a wooden stick with a piece of meat pierced in it. Apparently, he's roasting dinner on the living room bonfire. Roasting. Dinner. In. The. Living. Room. Bonfire. All right, I know that every house in this village had those little furnaces in the living room for purposes of boiling water or keeping the house residents warm during the cold nights but not for cooking. Cooking belongs to the kitchen!

"Hiccup." Dad's greeting snaps me out of my horrified stupor.

"Uh hey, dad." I greet back. My eyes are still glued to the burning furnace and roasting meat. Gods, this is simply isn't done. I start to mourn inside. Cleaning the house tomorrow will be a pain in the neck. The furnace ashes will be hard to clean.

Silence reign the room as I continue to just stare at the fire. The mood of the situation is awkward. My father clears his throat to get my attention.

"Oh, dinner's ready." He says. "I roasted some beef while you're still out." He gestures the space across him and hands me a stick with cooked meat.

I grimace as I take the food and sit. He smiles at me before taking a bite from his self-cooked dinner. I eye the beef warily. It's black and smells burnt. If I didn't see my dad eating it, I'll immediately categorize it as inedible.

"You're not hungry, Hiccup?" Dad asks.

"Huh? Oh! No, no. I am hungry." I reply hastily. Then throwing caution to the wind, I took a bite on the meat. Mom... I want to

cry.

"Wow, this is good." I chew slowly and try my best to hide my grimace. "Better than the last one you cooked!" I tell him while my mouth is still full.

Dad smiles at the compliment. "It's good to know that you like my cooking. Your mother used to be disgusted by it. Guess women just have a different taste. Anyway, just chew your food properly this time, Hiccup. Last time you ate my cooking, we went to the healer."

I hold back the tears threatening to flow from my eyes. Odin, is it awful! The beef is absolutely tasteless, tough, and dry. I feel like I'm eating a coal flavoured stone. But my father's pride and happiness at the complimentâ€œ he just looks so happy. I can't tell him the truth. I can't tell him how justified Mom was with her disgust in his cooking. Dear sweet Freya. Mom, I wish you're still here so I wouldn't be subjected to this kind of torture. I miss you so much. I swallow the food with great difficulty. But then I smile, painfully, to my father.

"Thanks, dad."

He then passes me another beef on a stick. I almost cry at the gesture. Dad is so oblivious to my expressions. He must have thought that I still want more. I still take the food nonetheless and start eating so I won't offend him. Things I do for love.

The dinner continues in silence. There's just the crackling of the fire, chomping of food, and an occasional shuffling of feet. Not that this is out of the ordinary. Breakfast and dinners we spent together are always like this. We don't really have much to talk about. I can't really say anything about smithing, dragons, or Viking issues. He will be confused, angry, and disappointed respectively. He can't talk about village and Viking issues either since that will only lead to anger and disappointment as well. He's still trying to fix the mess I made on the last raid I screwed up. We never talk about Mom too. It's justâ€œ awfully painful do so. We miss her so much.

My father suddenly stands up. "I have something to tell you, Hiccup."

I frown at that. This must be something serious judging from the tone he used. I thankfully drop my food. "Yes?"

"Tonight, I will be leaving with your Uncle and a handful of Vikings to the Juardu tribe." He says.

"What for?" I ask alarmingly. "Is there going to be a war?"

Aside from the dragon pests, Berk also worries for something else. Our village is full of resources and many tribes fought us for it. The Meat Head tribes are one of our greatest foes, they are as strong and tenacious as us but their attacks sorely lack smart planning. They also have lousy leadership, that's why they could always be beaten. The Long Shots and Shrimp Wimps, both coastal villages, made an alliance once to try and invade us by sailing and attacking from the Freezing to Death River. Their plan was good and creative. It was also one of the "close-call" battles since our village couldn't

protect itself from their skilled archers. The invasion only failed because the enemies' food and weapon supply ran out. Their situation also got worse when they got involved in a dragon raid. Whether or not we are at war with other people, dragons still come to raid Berk. The fire breathing creatures torched their ships and burned their people. The Long Shots and Shrimp Wimps have retreated at that. They must have pass the word about the dragons to others too since the Meat Heads stopped their constant attacks and instead asked for our alliance. The Juardu tribe and Bog Burglars followed soon after too. Apparently, the other villages thought we made the dragons attack the invaders. Oh, if they only knew the reality. But our village went along with the belief. It was a chance to rid ourselves of human enemies. So the alliance was made. The Meat Heads, Bog Burglars, Juardu, and Berk are brothers and sisters in war and trade. Each tribe is free to travel and stay in each other's villages with small to no fees. Some items will also be exclusively traded to the members of the alliance like Gobber's weapons and armours. If any other village attacks any member of the alliance, the remaining members must help and protect the affected ally and fight against the attacker.

The alliance was strong and enduring. It's already three generations old. The other tribes eventually learned the truth about the dragons though. That was a mess. Meat Heads and Bog Burglars accused us of lying and deceit while Berk vehemently denied the accusations. It was terrible. Meat Head and Bog Burglars were gearing for war. The alliance was on the verge of dissolving. It was Juardu who settled the matter by saying that they themselves offered the alliance and not Berk. Berk didn't imply to any of them that they could control dragons. It was something they believed through hearsays. Besides, all of the villages are benefiting well from the alliance. There was really nothing to complain. And so, albeit reluctantly, the issue was ended but it was never forgiven.

The alliance is only in effect by trade so far and never by war. But for father to say that he needed to go to Juardu with Vikings in tow? Is Juardu attacked? Who attacked them when in fact Juardu is the most peaceful village I know? Is this full-out war or just counterattack? Defense? Odin, my father is the first chief to go to war for the sake of the alliance.

"A messenger came, said there were strange sightings in their land. Flying shadows during the night to be exact. Their queen fears that they're dragons. She asks for our help." Dad answers as he takes a bag and starts packing.

"What?" I say incredulously. "Okay, I'm glad that you're not really going to war after all but are you saying that we'll be leaving this dragon infested place only to go to a potentially dragon infested place?"

My father sighed in frustration. "No, Hiccup. There's no "we". Only I, Spitelout, and a few other Vikings will leave for Juardu."

"Which is a potentially dragon infested place." I add.

Dad growls in annoyance. "Hiccup! This is serious. Dragons are going to try to raid our ally!" he yells.

"I know, Dad. But it's Juardu, a place across the Meat Head tribe and

Helheim's Lake. How could dragons be able to go there? And if dragons are there, why should we help? It's not part of the alliance's deal—"

"I'm a Viking, Hiccup. It's an occupational hazard! Vikings deal with dragons wherever they are!"

His green eyes glare with fury at me. His thick red beard trembles in anger. "I'm disappointed with you, Hiccup. As the village chief's son you should understand this."

I hang my head low, unable to meet his gaze. "Sorry, Dad. But after Mom, I—" I trail off unable to continue my sentence. I might have come off as selfish and insensitive because of my statements earlier but I'm only just a teenager with only one relative left. I saw my Mom be ripped away from me and I was helpless to do anything about it. I don't want that to happen again. I tried, and still trying, to become a Viking to get closer to my Dad. I want to become a Viking to honour my mother, to make Dad proud. I want to become a Viking to be able to fight alongside him and to make sure that I won't lose him the same way I lose Mom. But I'm not a Viking right now, I can't help him. I can't stop him. I don't want him to die. If the fight against dragons is in Berk, I won't mind. The people in here will always have my father's back. But in Juardu? I don't know. I don't know any Juarduan to say I could trust them with my Dad. I don't know.

I feel my father's hand gravely patting my head. "I understand, son. But this just had to be done." Pain was evident in his voice. I just reminded him with Mom.

"Then, I'll go with you!" I say stubbornly.

"Hiccup" Dad's face is stern and he grips my shoulder. "You will stay here."

"But—"

"You can't fight. You can't protect yourself, and you're all—" he waves his hand at me.

"You just gestured to all of me." I flatly say.

"Yes, all of you. Hiccup, you—" He sighs "Look son, you just can't come with me. It will be dangerous for you. You might fall off the ship..."

"Dad—"

"You might set the ship on fire!"

"Well, that will be stupid. I—"

"You might chop your head or any of our heads off!"

"Hey, that won't—"

"You might offend the queen!"

"I most certainly would no—"

"You might even cause a war between the two villages."

Now that is something I won't ever dream of doing. "Dad, I won't cause a war between villages." I say exasperatedly.

"Oh yes, you would." He insists, his eyes looking at me knowingly.

Well, I am a bit nosy and klutzy and trouble always seems to follow me. "Ok, rephrase." So, a little correction will be needed. "I will never cause war between villages intentionally." I tell Dad.

"That still means you might cause a war between villages." He points out.

"No, Dad. I'm really very extra sure that I won't." I try to convince him. Seriously. I mean I do mess up sometimes but I won't mess up on that kind of scale. I'm eligible to travel to Juardu with them.

"Listen to me, son..."

Uh oh, he's using the Chief tone. He only uses the Chief tone when his decisions are set in stone. No. No. "Can you not hear me?" I ask desperately.

"When you travel to other villages, it means you are qualified to carry the name of our village. You will represent all of us. Right now, you can't, Hiccup. You're not ready. You're still allâ€| this." He waves his hand to me again.

All right, now that's annoying. "You just gestured to all of me!"

"Yes and that's why you have to stay. Now, do we have a deal?" he asks menacingly.

"This conversation is feeling very one-sided." I deadpan. Come on, Dad. You didn't even listen to anything I have to say.

"Deal?" he asks again with a bit more force in it.

I sigh in defeat. Nope. As usual, he would not listen to me. "Deal." I answer reluctantly. I roll my eyes in annoyance. When will Dad ever listen to me?

"Good." My father nods and is satisfied with my compliance. He finishes packing and heads to the door.

"Train hard with Gobber. Try to stay out of trouble. I'll be backâ€| probably." he says and opens the door.

I hate this and I'm mad about it. "And I'll be here." I say tartly. He gives me one last look and then goes out.

I look at the slowly retreating figure outside and say "Maybe". But Dad doesn't hear that. He never ever does.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Author's Notes: <strong>Told you, things will be different. \*snickers\*

### 3. The Calm

\*\*Author's Notes: \*\*Thank you for putting this story to your faves and alerts. I really appreciate it. Divergary, thank you so much for your reviews! I hope you'll like this chapter too.

\*\*Disclaimer: \*\*I don't own How to Train Your Dragon or any of its character. They belong to Cressida Cowell (novel wise) and DreamWorks (movie wise).

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Well, This is Expected<strong>

\* \* \*

><p><em><strong>Chapter 3: The Calm<strong>\_

I'm flying. I don't know how but I am flying and the world looks so small beneath me. The wind is against my face and it feels great. The sky has never been so blue and clear. I smile. I've never felt so free until now. It's amazing. It's even made better by the presence of somethingâ€|someone together with me. I'm not alone in the skies. I'm sharing this experience with somebody else. I'm safe andâ€| happy.

I clench my hands and realize that I'm holding onto something. I can't tell what it is but I feel that it's important. Suddenly, there is a violent jolt and the sky turns from blue to eerie black. Screams and cries fill the air. The wind is still rushing past my face but this time it's hot. It feels like the wind became one with fire. Someone screams my name. I cannot recognize who it is but my heart tells me it is someone I know. Someoneâ€| very close to me. A sharp cry cuts through the air and a powerful force knocks me down. Then, I feel myself letting go and getting suspended in the air. It's hot. I feel like I'm melting yet at the same time, I don't feel hurt. Flames lick my skin inch by inch but I can't feel any pain. I keep falling and falling and falling. There are sounds of moving wings.

\_Hiccup!\_

â€|

..

.

I open my eyes. The sudden morning brightness in my room had me blink once, then twice. The ceiling greets me "good morning". I groan, lie to my side, and close my eyes. I still want to sleep.

"Hiccup!" a muffled voice yells outside.

I pull the bed covers over my head. I really really want to sleep some more. Yesterday ended badly for me, I think I deserve a bit more

rest. Not to mention that dream. I can't remember it clearly. My memory only gives me bits and pieces but it felt soâ€¦

"Hiccup! Get up, lad!"

I groan again as I recognize the voice. It's Gobber. What is he doing here? It's still early in the morning. Or is it? I take off the covers and sit up from the bed. I rub the sleep off my eyes. I yawn and stretch. Had I overslept? I finally stand up and look around my room. It's a mess. I run my hand through my hair irritated. I just woke up, probably later than expected. Gobber is hounding on my doorstep. Dad just left me last night for Juardu. My room is in a mess and most likely the entire house is in a mess. I still haven't had my breakfast and-

"Hiccup!"

Gobber is still hounding on my doorstep. Morningsâ€¦ love it!

"Just a moment!" I yell. I run my fingers through my hair. It's a mess as well but I don't have the time to comb it. Sighing, I just take my vest and fur boots and run downstairs. I go straight to our kitchen and into the water basin. I may not be able to fix my hair but at least I'll be decent enough with a clean face and breath.

I cup my hands and dip in the basin. The water is frigid cold but I'm used to it. I wash my mouth with water very well and then proceed to splash and scrub face.

"Hiccup!"

In my haste, I just wipe my face with my vest. Wow, I just rendered the cleaning of my face moot. Great. Groaning in disappointment, I wear my vest and boots and run to the front door. Once I open it, Gobber stands there with an ear to ear grin in his face. Now that usually means something bad for me.

"What?" I ask warily.

Gobber's grin grows wider. "Morning, lad. Looks like you cleaned up yourself good this time!" he greeted.

All rightâ€¦ that'sâ€¦ unusual for an early morning Gobber greeting. I touch my hair. "I-I do?"

The man draped his arm, the one with an amputation, on my shoulders in reassurance. Then we start walking away from my house. I then notice that he didn't have a hammer as a hand today. In its stead was a hook. Now how will you use a hook in the forge?

"'Course you do, Hiccup!" he says as he ruffles my hair with his good hand.

I frown at the treatment and push myself away from him. Now my hair is even messier. "Gobber!"

The man only laughs. "Oh, don't you worry so much. I'm sure the fish will still notice you even with that hair." He winks.

"Fish? What?"

Gobber shakes his head and rolls his eyes. He looks like he's talking with a five year oldâ€| Now, wait a rat eating minute!

"Oh you know, the fish with mane of golden sunshine?" my mentor says nonchalantly. "And sparkly blue eyes as clear as the sky?"

I stand there for moment. Then, I finally catch the gleam of the twin blade axe strapped on Gobber's back. Thenâ€| I panic.

"Astrid! Oh gods, Astrid! Astrid! Her axe! Aww, Odin! She's going to kill me! Gobber, why didn't you wake me up earlier? Where is she? The axe! Give me the axe! What time is it? I'm so dead!"

My mentor laughs at my predicament. Great. Gobber finds my impending doom through Astrid's hand hilarious.

"I'm glad you find this funny." I say flatly.

I like Astrid. I really really do but I don't want her to kill me!

"Don't worry so much, lad." Gobber gives me the twin blade axe carefully. Then he takes a small bag hanging from his belt and shakes it.

"Whetstones." he says and he put it in my arms together with the axe as well. "So next time, you wouldn't have to sharpen her axe not to mention that it will be counted as a gift." He winks.

I smile. This fixes everything. "Thanks! Butâ€| where will I find Astrid? Oh gods, she's still going to kill me if I can't give her the axe this morning!"

Gobber starts shoving me. Man, he's really strong even with a peg leg. "What? Where are we going?" I ask.

"To your beloved fish, of course!"

\* \* \*

><p>My jaws almost drop when we reach our destination. It is the dragon arena. It is the place where all the Viking trainees learn how to fight dragons. Oh how I dream to be able to come to this place! Well, I am here now but for a different reason.</p>

My eyes catch a blur of blonde and blue.

"Astrid!" I call her.

Her head whips around. Her braided hair sways gracefully with the movement. I wonder how it would feel to run my fingers through that hair. And then her lovely blue eyesâ€| are as cold and hard as winter ice. Her perfect lips set in an angry lineâ€| She's still beautiful even when furious. But that still doesn't change the fact that she \_is\_ furious.

"Dut duh duh, I'm dead." I mutter. Gobber gives me one last reassuring clap in the shoulder and set off to the other trainees perhaps to check if their weapons are in good condition. He left me

alone with Astrid.

Yup, I'm definitely dead.

"Hiccup." She snarls at me.

"Waitâ€| wait, Astrid. Just give me a chance to explainâ€|" I say as I back up slowly away from her. I may like her but I still want to live with all my limbs intact.

She stalks me like a dragon on a raid. Oh, she's absolutely livid. "I won't listen to anything you have to say."

I could hear someone snicker. I steal a glance from my side. Oh great. The twins are here watching. So as Fishlegs and Snoutlout. This will definitely go down to my humiliation history.

With my attention elsewhere, Astrid takes the chance and grabs me by the collar.

"Ack!"

She brings my face just inches near hers. "Now, where's my axe?" she asks frostily.

Had this been any other situation, I would have loved to let our faces be this close for as long as possible. But her expression promises bodily harm if her weapon isn't returned to her as soon as possible.

I gulp and dart my eyes to the axe precariously sandwiched between our bodies.

"Uh, currently between you and me." I tell her.

Someone cat whistles. "Oh, look. Two little love birds kissing." Tuffnut teases.

Ruffnut, his twin sister, scoffs. "She could do better."

Astrid's eyes widen as she realizes the closeness of our faces and she forcefully pushes me away. She grabs her axe from my arms and proceeds to kick me in the gut. I immediately fold and fall flat on the ground.

"Why would you do that?" I groan.

She stands over me and drops her axe's wooden handle on my stomach. It hit the same spot where she kicked me. "Owwwâ€|"

"That's for not returning my axe last night." She tells me.

Laughs burst out of the Viking trainees. Their humour is really obscure. I mean what's so funny about a guy getting beat up by a girl? Well, the girl is Astrid so it doesn't count but still.

"Augh" I moan as I gingerly stand up. Why does love have to hurt so much? My hand touches the bag of whetstones. Oh right, I tied it around my waist earlier since the axe was already heavy enough to carry alone. I loosen the ties and walks to Astrid, who is currently

busy checking her precious axe.

"Astrid?"

"What?" she snaps.

I give the bag to her. She looks at it confused. I almost blush at her expression. She's so cute. Really, seeing her like that erases all the pain she had inflicted upon me.

She opens the bag and takes a whetstone. She raises her brow at me.

"Uhâ€| Youâ€| you were asking for whetstones yesterday, right? So-so Iâ€|" trying to stop my blush and stammer in front of my crush and peers is one impossible task. It doesn't help that I could see Gobber behind them, near the weapon's holder. My mentor is grinning like crazy!

"A-anyway. Here it is! Soâ€| so I-Iâ€|" Astrid stares at me as I try to string one complete sentence together. She had this confused, annoyed, expecting, almost amused expression that is so cute that I can't take it anymore.

"So there! Goodbye! And see you tomorrow!" With that I fix my eyes to the ground and walk away as fast as possible.

Behind me, I could hear the trainees laugh as I meet Gobber.

"Stones? He gave you stones? Weird."

"What was that all about, Astrid?"

"Haha! That was a nice kick, Astrid!"

I sigh. I just blew my chance on making a good impression on Astrid. Arrgh! Why can't I get it together when I'm talking to her?  
!

"You'll get another chance, Hiccup." Gobber consoles me as together we made our way to arena's exit.

I sigh. "Of course." I answer sarcastically.

The man shakes his head in disapproval as he easily understands what I really meant with the statement. Though I rarely give up easily or get depressed, Gobber still frowns on my few moments of negativity. He says that such act is unbecoming of a chief's son. He also dislikes pessimistic apprentices. It's better if I continue on stubbornly as always even if everybody else lets me down. I'm also a much better company when I'm happily snarking around.

I hear rushed footsteps coming from behind us and I turn around. My heart speeds up at the sight of her.

"Astr-Ooof!"

She suddenly shoves something in my face. I bring my hands on it and pull it away. I blink once then twice at the item.

"A book?" I flip the pages. "A blank book?" I ask in wonder.

Then I look at Astrid. She looks nervous which is unusual. She's also avoiding direct eye contact with me.

"That's for everything else." She says and runs back immediately to the arena.

I stand there with an open mouth. Astrid just gave me a book. Astrid herself just gave me a book!

"Thanks, Astrid!" I yell at her. She didn't turn around. Well she's already far away so she might not have heard me. But that's okay.

"Oh wipe that grin off of your face, Hiccup." Gobber teases.

I look at him, still with the stupid grin in my face. "No"

The man just smiles at my antic.

\* \* \*

><p>The two of us walk back to the forge. All the way, I continue to flip the pages of the blank book that Astrid gave me. I couldn't help the happiness that I feel as I touch the covers. Astrid gave me a book. Astrid gave me a gift. Astrid herself gave me a book as a gift!<p>

It's the best thing that had ever happened to me since the long strings of unluckiness I've had recently. The messy house, the dragon raid, father's cooking, father's departure, father's disappointment, the possible invasion of dragons in Juardu, father being far away in a potentially dragon infested land that I don't know. I sigh as I remember all of those. I wish father had taken me with him. Really, I won't cause trouble on the expedition but no matter, I'm here and there's nothing that I could do to change it.

I flip the book again and smile. Well, if I have left then this wouldn't have happened. Things might have been bad lately but Astrid has chased them away with her gift. She always makes me feel better whether she's aware of it or not.

"Hiccup, if you keep doing that, the book might get ripped off before you could even use it." Gobber comments as I flip the pages again.

"I can't help it." I say "It's justâ€¦ it's from Astrid! And it's so perfect. I mean I already filled all of my sketch books a few days ago. A new, blank book is just what I needed!"

"I know." Gobber mutters.

We finally reach the forge and he opens the shop's doors. We still have work to do and we're already late on our regular schedule since we took a trip to the arena.

Gobber started the fire while I wear my working apron. As I hang my vest beside the door, I caught sight of something on the tool table.

I frown as I recognize it.

"Gobber, what's my sketch book doing here?" I ask as I turn the pages. It was the sketchbook filled of my contraption's plans, diagrams, and calculations. This shouldn't be here. This is supposed to be in my work room at the back of the forge.

"Oh?" the man calmly stokes the furnace's fire as he answers. "Hope you don't mind. We looked through those last night."

"We?" a horrible feeling suddenly settles in my stomach.

"Well, the lass was terribly angry last night when I told her the axe isn't ready yet. She was all ready to hunt you down and strangled you at your house. I have to distract her, you know?" he says nonchalantly.

For some reason, I found his explanation unbelievable. I narrow my eyes in suspicion.

"Really?"

"Of course! Your sketchbooks did the trick! The moment she saw it, all her anger disappeared!" he stands up and changes his hand from a hook into a hammer.

"Really?" I ask again. I can't get rid of the suspicion of something terrible at the back of my head.

Gobber claps my shoulders. "Get a grip lad! You've impressed her! She was speechless when she saw your sketches." He grins at me and the bad feeling gets worse.

"R-really?"

"Of course! I even gave her one of your sketchbooks since she liked it so much." He says before picking up a metal and starts working.

A few seconds passed and it finally sinks into my head.

"You gave Astrid my what? !"

"Your sketchbook, Hiccup."

"But my sketchbook is still here." I wave the item wildly in my hands. Oh no. Please tell me he didn't. He just didn't.

"You have two books lad. I gave her the other one."

He then goes back to his work while I look at him with multiplying horror.

He gave Astrid my other sketchbook. He gave Astrid my \_other \_sketchbook filled with drawings of her. Okay, there are few scenery sketches in a page or two but it was mostly Astrid in all her glory in that book!

Aww man, she'll definitely know my crush on her now!

I see Gobber smiling mischievously as he hammers on the hot

steel.

"Gobber!"

\* \* \*

><p>After getting over with the fact that my mentor just gave me away to Astrid, I go on with my work and do my hammer exercise. I can't believe it. Astrid now knows my crush on her. So that's why she can't look at me in the eye when she gave me the book. Meeting her will be extremely awkward from now on.</p>

Hours passed and before we knew it, it was already lunchtime.

Gobber's stomach growls in hunger. Wiping the sweat from his brow, he tells me that it's time to take a break. He washes his face and switches his hammer hand to a mug.

"I'm off to the Mead Hall. You?"

"Nah, I'll stay here a bit more. I have to finish something."

He looks at me suspiciously. "Hiccup"

"No. Don't worry, Gobber. I'll be fine." I insisted.

The man rolls his eyes. "Oh sure. Lots of hot steels around here. Lots of razor sharp blades. And you all alone with a lot of time to spare. What could possibly go wrong?"

"Oh come on. You know you could trust me. Remember yesterday? I was alone here and nothing bad happened, right? I'll be fine."

He still looks unconvinced. "You're up to something."

"Up to?" I laugh nervously "What could I be possibly up to?" I try to look as innocent as possible.

Gobber sighs. "We'll you did cover the shop well yesterday."

I grin at that.

"And most of the work is done here."

I nod in agreement.

After a few more seconds of thinking, he finally relents. "Fine. You could stay but firstâ€œ;" he takes a bucket full of water and pours its contents to the furnace's fire. He nods in satisfaction as the flames died. Then he takes away the axes and locks them in a secure cabinet.

"What was that for?" I ask.

"Precaution" he simply answers.

I give him a flat look.

He shrugs. "You can never be too careful, you know."

"You didn't have any problems leaving me yesterday." I mutter.

"That's because I'm in a rush. I have better things to do and you had a lot of things to do. You were busy enough to keep you away fromâ€| whatever you do whenever you have lots of free time." He explains as he washes his hand.

Well, he does have point on that.

"All right. I'm off. Be sure to eat after you're done. Can't have your stomach growling while we work later." He says before he hobbles towards the Mead Hall.

"Sure thing." I reply. Then I start to clean the forge. It will be harder to clean the place at night when everything is dark. It also makes the afternoon work more bearable with less dusts and soot.

I wash my hands and face and remove my apron after cleaning. I take my sketchbook and go to my work room. It's a small place behind the forge. It has no windows. It had a single table in the left corner with a wooden chair. Drawings of dragons and my inventions are pinned on its walls. It's my secret haven.

In the other corner of the room is my newest project. I call it the Spear Launcher. It's inspired from the Shrimp Wimp's cross bows. Gobber had his hand on one of those weapons during a business trade a couple of years ago. It's an amazing tool. The archer wouldn't waste so much energy on pulling the bow and firing an arrow one at a time. With a crossbow, the only thing you have to do is load it with arrows, aim, and fire. It is efficient too since you'll be able to fire several arrows from it continuously in just seconds.

I based my contraption's design on the crossbow. Berk is battling dragons not humans. Crossbows wouldn't be that effective against those creatures. But if I make one big enough to be able to launch a spear, killing a dragon even in the air will be as easy as a breeze.

I've worked on it for almost six months now. The designs were easy but building it was the tricky part. I have to hide my project from both my father and Gobber. I just know that once they see this, they would immediately dismantle it and forbid me from doing something like it ever again. I must have traumatized them when I tested out my Mangler. Now that was a big mess. I think old man Ack still hadn't forgiven me for destroying his house and nearly decapitating him with the contraption. Father wasn't also able to fix the storage house I've demolished with it too. He was furious with that. Even though I've pointed out that the Mangler was indeed effective with the destruction it caused and the problem was only a mild calibration issue, father still had it axed down and burned. He said it was a Thing set on human destruction. It should not exist.

That incident led me on sneaking on the forge at night to build the Spear Launcher. They should not see it until I've tested it and perfected it. I have to show them that not all my inventions are that bad. They're useful. I may not be able to fight but I could make something that will help me fight.

My invention was already completed. I just have to test it and make a few adjustments. Noon is the perfect time to do it since most of the people are in the Mead Hall for lunch. No one would see me. Testing the Spear Launcher must be done when there is still light; doing it at night will be impractical. I'll be aiming blindly and will cause more accidentsâ€| like the Mangler. I really need to stop thinking about that.

I close my contraption into its Stand-by mode: the bow folded back with a lid covering it. It looks like a harmless wheel burrow during this mode. I pick up a few steel rods I stashed in my room and put it inside the contraption. The test requires a real spear but I can't take one without raising suspicion from Gobber. That man always knows when one of the razor sharp objects in forge goes missing. Father doesn't own any spears too. He had always preferred axes and swords so those are the only ones available in our home. The steel rods will have to do and I've made them myself. I made sure that they would weigh the same as a real spear. They're a good substitute.

I wheel the Spear Launcher out of my work room. I carefully check outside through the shop's windows. No one is there. The coast is clear. I open the doors and quickly push the contraption. Once it was out, I quickly go back to the doors to close it.

"Hiccup." A familiar voice calls me.

I yelp in surprise and horror. I turn around and there she is, looking at me with narrow blue eyes and one hand resting on the contraption.

"Hi Astrid! Hi Astrid! Umm...Hi Astrid!"

She raises her eyebrow bemusedly. "Do you always greet people that way?"

I blush at the question. Of course I could answer "Well only to you" but that would just sound wrong. It's cheesyâ€| Snotlout cheesy.

"Uhâ€| "

She scoffs. "Never mind." Then she looks away.

There is silence between us. The situation is awkward. I like her and she knows it. I'm sure she will be wary of me now since, from what I've heard with my uncle when he visits the household, Astrid is adverse to any romance or courtship. Uncle Spitelout shares to us all of Snotlout's failure in earning her affections, not that it daunted my cousin in his efforts. He said that Astrid is Hel bent on becoming a shield maiden. Boys and marriage is far from her mind.

But here I am, standing a foot away from her, pinning for her and she's fully aware of it. I wonder what she's thinking about me now. I wonder what she would do to me now. How would she treat me? Will we still be "maybe friends" acquaintances? Will she break me in half? Will she kill me?

"What is this?" she suddenly asks with her eyes fixated on the "wheel burrow" she's touching.

Uh oh. This bad. This really really bad. "Uhâ€| a wheel burrow?" I tell her as I pull the contraption away from her.

"Oh really?" she put a hand on her hips and strike the ground with the handle of her axe. She looks intimidating.

"Ye-yes" I insist and walk away with the contraption. I have to get away from her. I have to test this first.

Astrid caught up and places herself in front of me. She's blocking my way. I turn to her side and walk past her. In the corner of eye, I think I see her frown.

"You're acting weird." She suddenly says behind my back.

Her words surprised me and I trip on the ground. "What?" I round on her.

She looks at me with a thoughtful face. "Well, weirder."

I stare at her dumbfounded. It must have made her nervous and she frowns and grabs me by the collar. "Anyway, start talking."

"Iâ€| I" I try to break free but it is no use. Her grip is very strong.

"I'm not stupid enough to believe that that-" she gestures to my contraption with her axe. "Is just a mere wheel burrow. So stop lying." She demands.

She brings her axe so close to face. The blade gleams dangerously. Eep.

"Astridâ€| "

She narrows her eyes and the axe goes closer to my face.

"O-okay! It's actually a Spear Launcher!" I finally admit.

She drops me and looks at my invention impressively. "Spear Launcher?"

"Yeah yeahâ€| it's a contraption that will shoot spears against the dragons like a crossbow. Only, crossbows are for humans and they launch arrows and not spears and they're smaller andâ€| "

I glance at her face and I know with the expression she's wearing, I lost her the moment I said "crossbow" .

"Oh! You don't know about crossbows. Well, that's understandable since no one in the village uses it. Gobber only has them for learning purposes and-"

"Is that another invention, Hiccup?" Astrid cuts through my explanation.

"Huh?" then I see her calculating gaze. I gulp. "Uhhâ€| yes?"

She shakes her head in disapproval and turns away. Oh great. She'll tell Gobber about this!

"No, no, no. Astrid, wait! Wait!" I yell as I run after her. "Please, Astrid. Listen! Just please listen. I promise this will not end in a disaster. I swear. The Spear Launcherâ€| I'm sure this would not be like my other inventions. I won't mess up this time. Just pleaseâ€|"

Still, she didn't stop walking.

"Could you please just give me a chance to prove myself to the village?" I tell her desperately. "My fatherâ€| everyone always says that I can't fightâ€| that I can't be a warrior. I can't help." I clench my fists. "And I admit I can't ever pass to be a Viking but I'm not giving up! I still want to help! I may not be able to fight with swords and axes but with my inventionsâ€| I knowâ€|" I take a deep breath and speak with pure conviction. "I know I can fight."

Amazingly, she had stopped and stood there listening to me. Her face is unreadable but her eyesâ€| they're boring into me as ifâ€| I don't know. I've never really guessed how her mind works. I don't know what she means with that gaze.

It's almost like an eternity has passed between us standing there and looking at each other. Astrid isn't saying anything yet. Numbly, I succumb to the nagging thought in my head. It's hopeless. She doesn't understand.

"Fine." I sigh "Go and tell, Gobber. I don't care. I will finish my invention regardless of what you all will think." I go back to my Spear Launcher and heads off to the woods. I still need to test it. I don't need to see Astrid's reaction. I know it will only break my heart.

\* \* \*

><p>I venture to the forests north of the village. It's only a quick walk from the forge with numerous and definitely indifferent targets. I'm sure the trees wouldn't mind if I hit them with the spearsâ€| errâ€| steel rods, right?<p>

The pathway is a bit rough so I have to carefully manoeuvre the Spear Launcher. The last thing I want is to accidentally activate it and have it shooting randomly in all directions.

I also have to mind where I'm going. Venturing too deep into this forest is dangerous. Years ago, Vikings had made expeditions into this very woods. People had observed that after the dragon raids are over, the creature always fly to the Hopeless Mountain. They thought the nest could be there. They thought that to solve our "pest" problem once and for all, they must look for the nest and destroy it. "Bring the fight to our enemies" they said. Four search expeditions later with no single Viking returning to the village, the idea was disregarded and any trips to the forest have become forbidden. A few Viking training sessions are still conducted in the place but they never last past twilight and trainees are expressly warned to stay within the training zone. People had deemed the forest cursed. No one should go in it alone. Well, as if that would stop me.

Spotting the perfect place, I begin setting up my invention. I have

to move fast. Lunch wouldn't be that long. Gobber will be back at the forge in an hour at best. I quickly adjust the aimer and toggle the bow to make sure it's secure. I then load the rods and look for the perfect target. I choose a random tree about seven feet away from me. I take my knife and make a mark on it. Then I do the same to six more trees near it. Smiling in satisfaction, I head back to the launcher. I take a deep breath.

"Okay, it's go time. It's go time."

I aim on the trees. Once I'm confident enough that I won't miss, I pull the trigger. The launcher jerk a bit at the force it emitted but I hold on to it firmly. The Mangler's backlash had been far more powerful. I could still remember how it threw me off my feet. This, on the other hand, is something I could take. I distinctly hear the rod whizzed through the air and with a loud thunk, hit a tree.

My knuckles white on the trigger, I dare to look forward on the targets. And then, I release the breath I didn't know I was holding.

Yes!

There, dead on the X-mark, is the rod. I hit it. I hit it. I hit it! Yes! I smile. Yes, it works! Eager to prove myself that it isn't a lucky shot, I continue with the test.

\* \* \*

><p>At the end, four out of the seven rods hit their mark. Not bad, I think as I struggle to pull out the rods from the tree trunks. But I still have to improve a lot of things. New designs and calculations run through my head. I have to reduce the backlash force the launcher emits when it shoots. I have to make the bow firmer since it's starting to be a bit wobbly after the fourth shot. I also have to design a way to make the contraption load more than seven spears.</p>

But it works. I think happily. It works. I didn't mess up!

I look into the sky. Uh oh. Not good.

I immediately pack up the launcher. I lost track of time! The sky is already turning into that warm orange colour. It's afternoon. Gobber's going to kill me.

Hastily running my way back to the forge, I start making a list of excuses in my mind. I also have to find a way to hide my invention without him seeing it. This is so mess up.

By some Odin given miracle, there are not much people in the streets and most of them are those who act like I didn't exist. For once, I'm glad that no one really notices me. As innocently as possible, I walk past them and continue to the forge. I slowly open the door and peer in. I frown.

"Gobber?"

I receive no answer. "Gobber?" I call again. There is no response what so ever. I go in. "You'reâ€| notâ€| here?"

Sure enough, no one is inside. I find it unusual, not that it's a bad thing for me, but Gobber should have been here right now. Ignoring the absence of my mentor, I immediately wheeled the launcher inside my work room. After making sure that the room doesn't look suspicious, I change into my working attire and start the fire.

While I tend to the furnace, I start to think clearly about the situation. Gobber's not here and it's already afternoon. What could have possibly happened while I'm out in the woods? He was reluctant to leave me alone earlier so I was really sure that he will be rushing his lunch just to get back and keep an eye on me. Then I remember my encounter with Astrid. I almost stop at the thought. Sheâ€| she could have ratted me out. It only makes sense. It's something she would do. I meanâ€| it's not like anyone would believe that my invention will work. I feel sad about that becauseâ€| even Astrid doesn't believe in me. My fatherâ€| Gobberâ€| I sigh. No point in thinking about that. The launcher works and once they see it in action, I know everything will turn out fine.

Someone hit me hard on the head and I drop the fire stoker. "Ow!" With a hand at the back my head, I turn around to face my attackerâ€| and get the surprise of my life.

"That's for leaving me." Astrid spat.

"Whatâ€| "

"Ahâ€| So nothing bad happen this time too? Good job, Hiccup!" Gobber's voice suddenly booms inside the shop.

"Gobber?" I look at the man. He had a satisfied grin in his face.

"Was worried a bit back there. I got too caught up teaching the kids in the Dragon arena." He explains jovially.

"Dragonâ€| arena?" I ask dumbly while looking back and forth at Astrid and Gobber.

"Yupâ€| This nice lass here thought it will be good to have me share a lesson or two with them since I'm an ex-Viking and all. Phlegma is doing a good job teaching but she had never been eaten by a dragon before!" my mentor narrates enthusiastically.

I throw a questioning look at Astrid "Uhhâ€| "

Then Gobber suddenly lunges at me. "Iâ€| gave them a special lesson about surviving dragon's bite." He says with a proud gleam in his eyes.

I laugh nervously. "Thatâ€| that's good!" I tell him. I like and respect Gobber but sometimesâ€| his love for the battle field is a bit overwhelming for me. I guess him being taken out of the Viking ranks unwillingly had its negative effects.

Wanting a change of topic, I point at Astrid. "Uhmmâ€| anyway, what is she doing here?"

My mentor gives me a mischievous wink. "Well, I thought it will be nice for her to see you work."

"What?" Both Astrid and I ask.

Gobber hums amusingly. "Oh, both of you don't be shy."

"Excuse me." Astrid and I say at the same time again. She glares at me for that.

"Your drawings, Hiccup! Astrid said she'll be interested watching you sketch some time. Well, now is the best time since you have a new book and all, right?"

I blush at the suggestion and when I look at Astrid, she's blushing as well. It's cute.

"Now off you go!" Gobber gestures for us to go outside.

"Butâ€|" I try to protest but he would have none of it.

"No. You two, go now. It's my assignment for you, lad. Now go!" he insists.

I look back at my crush. She's avoiding my gaze like a plague. With a sigh, I relent and remove my apron and take my vest. I quickly pick up my new sketch book and charcoal from my working room.

"Leâ€|Let's go." I mumble to her.

\* \* \*

><p>We are walking near the river. I could hear Astrid's footsteps following me. We didn't really talk. Just walking and walking. Things are awkward between us what with my crush on her and my outburst this noon. What could we really talk about?</p>

Some of the villagers gave us questioning looks as we pass by. I mean who wouldn't? Hiccup \_and\_ Astrid strolling around Berk \_together\_? But thankfully, most of them eventually ignored us. Guess it's because it wasn't really their business, or that I'm the Chief's son, or because of the death glare Astrid had sent in their way. I'm pretty much sure it's because of the last one.

Then, I hear her footsteps stop. Curiously, I look back at her. She's still avoiding my gaze.

"That was for everything else." She says.

I frown. What did she mean by that? "Wha-"

She finally locks her eyes with mine. They are the clearest blue and they shine with an emotion I never expected for her to direct at me - Respect. Now what did I do to deserve that?

Then she punches me in the shoulder. "Ow!"

"Next time, don't expect me to cover for you." She snaps.

My eyes widen at a realization. She had actually distracted Gobber

with the arena. She didn't rat me out. "You-Oww!"

She sends another punch, this time in the face. "And don't ever draw me without permission ever again."

I blush again. Did she have to bring that up and with a punch too? But of course she's Astrid. She's not Astrid if she didn't confront this issue without a touch of brutality. Butâ€¦

"Do we always have to be this way?" I ask as I nurse my jaws. Manâ€¦ that was one powerful punch.

She only glares as a response. "Hiccupâ€¦" she says warningly.

I roll my eyes. "Fine. Fine. I won't draw you without permission."

She huffs in satisfaction. "Good." Then she turns around to walk away.

I open my book and take my charcoal. "Soâ€¦ can I draw you now?"

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Author's Notes:</strong> The roller coaster ride will start next chapter. I just want to flesh out Hiccup and Astrid's relationship first. Hope it didn't look forced.

Anyways, helpful criticisms are greatly appreciated.

End  
file.